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CHRISTIAN WARRIOR'S HOME

A. A. C. N. VAWDREY, M.A.

FOREWORD BY THE RIGHT REV.
THE LORD BISHOP OF TRURO



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THE CHRISTIAN WARRIOR'S
HOME

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BY THE REV.

A. A. C. N. VAWDREY, M.A.

Vicar of St. Budock, Falmouth.

Foreword by the Right Rev. the
LORD BISHOP OF TRURO.

LONDON: ROBERT SCOTT
ROXBURGHE HOUSE
PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C

MCMXVII

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Dedication

To

MY DEAR PARENTS

Through whom, by God's Grace, I received
the "Shield of Faith"

Foreword by the
Rt. Rev. the Lord Bishop of Truro.

I am glad to write a few lines to commend these addresses to any who wish for short and simple readings on the Church, on the Christian life and duty, and especially on some of the questions that are stirring in all men's minds to-day.

WINFRID O. TRURON:

February, 1917.

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I

Are we Zealous ?

“And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.”—HEBREWS vi. 11.

I FEAR that when people speak of *the Church* they very often talk as if the clergy alone constituted the Church. For instance, when a man is about to be ordained we hear some say “he is going into the Church,” but as a matter of fact he entered the Church when he was baptized, and every baptized person is a member of Christ's Church. All who are baptized make up the rank and file of Christ's Church, and the clergy are commissioned and some of the laity are non-

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commissioned officers in that body. We know how much depends upon the men as well as upon officers in a battle, so also the work and advance of the Church of Christ is by no means confined to the clergy but very largely to all those who have been "admitted into the congregation of Christ's Flock." You will see, then, that the failure or success of the Church depends to a great extent on how far each individual member of the Church is doing his or her share.

The National Mission is a distinct call to every member of the Church to stir himself to greater action both in his own spiritual life and also in trying to influence others. Enthusiasm *does* infect us. There is no compelling, iron discipline in Christ's Church—it is left to the honour and conscience of each individual member. Is it fair to lay to the charge of the officers of the Church all the indifference, apathy and want of response which are too evident up and down the land? The National Mission calls us all as a body to abandon some of our happy-go-lucky ways and to concentrate more of our time and

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attention upon those things which in our hearts we know to be of the highest importance.

I seem to hear some one say, "Be a little more definite; what do you want us to do?" Well, I will outline a few directions in which we can show a renewed enthusiasm.

1. Is there not a single person in this congregation who would be happier by becoming a full member of Christ's Church and ceasing to be merely a spectator, and that from a distance? I say it in all kindness. Are you not losing much, are you not in fact openly thwarting Christ's own directions by following Him only as far as you like, but not as far as He has commanded?

2. Then a word to those who are communicants. Are you quite satisfied that you show any great love for His Sacraments by coming only two or three times a year? You know that it is the very highest way of gaining spiritual power for yourself and also the greatest channel of help for those who are near and dear to you. More regular and frequent Communions. May

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I urge this thought upon you as a means of deepening your spiritual life ?

3. Then, again, is it asking very much to suggest that more might avail themselves on Wednesday evenings of the opportunity to pray together for *thirty-five* minutes ? Surely it will be found an oasis of spiritual help in the midst of a busy week ! Many ask what good is the Church to me ? But, my dear friend, may I ask you in reply what use *you* are making of all the Church offers to you ? She cannot force you to become living members, but she persuades, appeals : don't blame her, then, if she is weaker in enthusiasm and numbers just because you and others will not respond to her message, which is indeed Christ's message to you.

Some may say the clergy are slack, they are not interested in our spiritual welfare. But, surely, even if that be sadly true in some places, you are not going to sacrifice your inheritance here and now when it rests with you to demand your rights ? If you really are anxious to enjoy all that Christ offers you in His Church you

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could very soon break down clerical slackness and disinterestedness by the overwhelming pressure of your own thirst and hunger for spiritual things. What good is England to me if I enjoy none of the rights and privileges which are an Englishman's ?

But to enjoy *them* even I must conform myself to her laws as a true citizen. Am I a *poor* Christian just because I am always criticizing and trying to prove the needlessness and inutility of Christ's own regulations ?

II

Not to be Neglected

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?”—HEBREWS ii. 3.

EVEN in these days there are many who hesitate to join friendly societies and doubt the benefits of such institutions.

We cannot read our Bibles without seeing that our Lord Jesus Christ founded upon this earth a Divine Society which He called His Church. He laid down definite rules for admission into it and ordained a very distinct and binding rule, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” The blessing upon matrimony and the funeral service over our departed are intended only for those who have been baptized.

What do we see to-day? Is it not a vast outer circle of persons who profess no kind of religious belief, and then

Not to be Neglected

another circle of men and women who while they admit the Being of God, the Personality of Christ and the Presence of the Holy Spirit, yet go on for years without attempting to place themselves within the activities of that Triune God ; they do, it is true, go to places of Christian worship, hoping to obtain some kind of satisfaction to themselves, but they would not call themselves downright members of Christ. Why is this ? It would appear that many have set up a standard of perfection which it seems to them is quite beyond their reach and which they decline even to aim at lest they fall short of it : or, again, is it because they have no desire as yet to allow Christian principles of Faith and Practice to influence their daily life and work ?

Whichever it be they are sadly in error.

First of all because our Lord has never stated that we shall be perfect in this life ; but we are bidden to go from strength to strength—now in the valley, now on a higher plane.

Next, if we will not allow Christian principles of Faith and Practice to influ-

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ence all our transactions, then we are certainly sinning against our own convictions. One person may say I cannot join Christ's Church out and out while my daily work or calling places me in the midst of rough living, swearing, doubtful acts and an atmosphere of ungodliness.

But it was just to meet such a condition of things, to help us against the enemy, that Christ pleads with us to become members of His Church. If Christ is no good to us while we are at work or in business, and is only useful when we retire from active life, then all I can say is that Christ's Church and all its helps were never ordained as a kind of Home of Refuge for those who have retired from active service and have tried to run two-thirds of their earthly life without troubling about Christ or the very means which He has placed within our reach just in order that we may have support, spiritual and intellectual, "all the days of our life," and not merely at the end of our life. "Give us this day our daily bread" refers not only to the "meat that perisheth," but also to that Spiritual Food to

Not to be Neglected

which our Lord referred when He said, "I have meat to eat which ye know not of."

Only yesterday I received a letter from a young soldier who says: "I shall certainly take the Sacrament as soon as I have a chance. I feel the need of help from above more than ever, as there is so much to listen to and rather more hardships than I have had. I am sorry to say I haven't seen a man kneel down to say his prayers since I have been here." Ah! if some would only believe it, life with all its temptations and dangers, life at its very height, when Satan is strongest, needs most the Sanctuary of Christ's Church and the power and peace that flow out from Sacrament and prayer—"a tower of strength against the face of our enemy." Yet persons are saying, my environment, my surroundings, my work make religion impossible. Why, you are depriving yourself of the very remedy against such things—the remedy of being a witness for Christ amid surroundings that call for courage, heroism and sometimes sacrifice and contempt. In war men

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gladly put up with hardships, but how few desire to become real soldiers of the Cross of Christ ! I am confident that many are kept from taking a definite step into Christ's Church just because they are timid about their past, but Christ has provided for confession of sins and their forgiveness now and here upon earth. Those who will not take the step because they love their present life which they think lays them under no obligations—though they are sadly mistaken—are “crucifying Christ afresh and putting Him to an open shame.” The sooner a man faces that fact the better for his eternal welfare.

“In a collision between two trains at Aisgill (September, 1913) sixteen persons were killed. The engine-driver (named Caudle) of one of the trains admitted himself to have been at fault. He was busy on the footboard of his engine, oiling it, so as to get a better pace up the incline, and he forgot to look up at the signals which were against him. He was a man of excellent character, with a good record, and at the very time of the acci-

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dent was attending to his work. But he made the fatal mistake of neglecting one of the first duties of an engine-driver—strict attention and obedience to the signals which were there for his guidance. “On the great railway of life God has many signals of warning and direction for us. We may read them in His Word the Bible : we may see them in His Providential dealings with us and others.

“It is not enough to be diligent in performing the duties and discharging the claims of our earthly relationships. If we forget to look up, and learn what God has to say to us ; if we fail to obey His plain commands, we shall most surely bring trouble and sorrow (it may be irremediable) upon ourselves and others. ‘How shall we escape if we *neglect* so great salvation ? ’”¹

¹ This anecdote is taken from *Teaching by Illustration* (J. W. W. Moeran).

III

Calls us as a Mother

“Compel them to come in, that My House may be filled.”—ST. LUKE xiv. 23.

THESE words were uttered by our Lord. They occur in the Gospel for to-day.

It is to be remembered that this “compulsion” was only ordered as a final resource, and it applied merely “to those who were in the highways and hedges.”

None of those who had already refused to come to the great Supper are included in this last appeal. For of those our Lord said, “None shall taste of My Supper.”

“It is common in the East for travellers, not intending to tarry in a place, to take their refreshment under a hedge by the roadside, and it was such as these

Calls us as a Mother

that were to be invited to the neglected feast.

“The term ‘compulsion’ here signifies merely persuasion, entreaty urgently pressed.

“This parable has been often used with great fitness in relation to the Gospel: when the Jews rejected it, the Gentiles were invited.”¹

Our Lord Himself said: “No man can come to Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.”

We must banish from our minds, then, any idea of force such as characterized the Inquisition or underlay the martyrdoms of the early Church or the massacres which have defiled even Christian history. St. Paul’s own standpoint was “the *Love* of Christ constraineth us.”

Acts of Parliament will never make men sober or truthful or industrious, nor is there *any* force except spiritual and moral force which will compel men to come to Christ. “What think ye of Christ—whose Son is He?” are words

¹ Dr. John Campbell.

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which involve the discipleship of Christ or the neglect of His Table. That God *could* force us is an obvious fact ; but *then* our freewills would be rendered worthless and our service would not be quite, if at all, a willing and cheerful service. "God loveth a cheerful giver." All the methods of the Gospel are based upon persuasion.

The appeal is ever to the heart and mind. It is not even based upon fear of consequences, for "perfect love casteth out fear." What, then, is compelling you and me to become more faithful disciples of Christ? Is it the hope of Heaven? That is not the highest or best motive.

Is it self-satisfaction or a seeming refuge from unknown yet dreaded possibilities hereafter? Such a motive is selfish and quite unworthy of our consideration.

No, these shall not be our reasons for coming to Christ but rather the response of a heart that is anxious to witness for truth against falsehood, for right against wrong, for faith against materialism, for gratitude against utter indifference.

Calls us as a Mother

There are, indeed, compelling influences which cluster round the great battleground of the Cross, and still to-day are the principles of warfare against the spiritual foes of mankind. We are daily faced by the poisonous mist of doubt and unbelief ; we are constantly to be on our guard against unseen and unexpected temptations, and no mere earthly armour can protect us against such enemies. Therefore we need His Sacred Food to strengthen our spirits and the Presence of the Holy Ghost the Comforter to guide us on our way till we reach His House "not made with hands."

God's methods with man are as "the gathering together of chickens under the hen," or punishment and bitter wailing because we did not know "the time of His visitation." Is not the vast response from our great Empire due, in the main, to patriotism, which means "zeal for our country's freedom and rights"? This has been the great compelling force that has sacrificed dear ones, money, pleasures, ay, in some cases, everything, that our house may be filled with strength to face

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the foe. What compelling influence is at work in our individual lives ?

Are men still allowing property and personal motives to be excuses ? Is it a time to exploit private interests against national perils ? Apply the same argument to the spiritual fight. Are men and women allowing scruples and unscriptural ideas and motives to keep them back from enlisting as soldiers of the Cross through Christ's own way—in Baptism ? Are the soldiers of the Cross still actually taking part in open mutiny against the Table of the Lord ?

Let us beware lest we come under that class which, though lovingly bidden, excommunicates itself by its own fatal refusal to come forward in Christ's *way*—*that* “ *His* House may be filled.”

IV

Are we Workers ?

“Why have ye stood here all the day idle ?”—ST.
MATTHEW XX. 6.

IT must be remembered at the very outset that the parable of the labourers in the vineyard is a spiritual and not an earthly picture. As we look at some masterpiece of a great painter it is surely the central idea which impresses us most.

Take a photograph : it is the person represented by it who interests us—other things are details. We must not press inquisitively into the smaller points of the parable. The first Lesson for to-day speaks to us of God's *work* in creation.

The picture our Lord draws of His Church on earth is that of a householder who has to be continually engaging men and women to carry on the work which

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He desires to be done. Did He not Himself say to His mother, "Wist ye not that I must be in the things of My Father"? The very word vineyard suggests work in order that there may be a good harvest. This kind of occupation in some countries implies also the work of defence—the keeping off of locusts which very quickly destroy the vines.

I am told by one who has worked in a vineyard in South America that locusts are still a very deadly foe.

Brethren, our work as members of Christ's Church is one of building up, cultivation, but it is also one of defence against the enemies of the Cross of Christ.

(1) Not one of us has a right to be idle in things which are Christ's. It was never intended that all Christian work should be left to the clergy. Therefore, Sunday School teachers, district visitors and members of the Church of England Men's Society have received a call to work in Christ's vineyard. It must sometimes occur to some that they are doing nothing. They may be in the market-place, which represents the busiest

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spot of this world's work, but if they have no spiritual interests, no definite work for Christ, then surely they are standing idle in their Heavenly Master's sight. Can you say that no man hath hired you ?

Where is the voice of conscience ? Where is the cup of cold water given in His Name ? Where is the response of your heart to the waifs and strays of England, to the genuine poverty and wretchedness and godlessness of many homes in our midst ?

These are calls to service for the Master which come to all of us at some time or other in our life.

But to turn for a moment to the work of defence. What are we doing there ? Are we idle while a branch of the vineyard in Wales is threatened with harm, and they who go by tear down her hedges and pluck off her grapes ? If one member suffer, the whole body suffers with it. In order to fulfil the law of Christ we have to bear one another's burdens. When Bishop Trelawney was threatened with death, there were 20,000 Cornishmen who desired to know the reason why.

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When Christ's work is imperilled by lack of means to carry it on, are there not loyal hearts and true who will stand up for Jesus ?

“ Christian, dost thou see them
On the holy ground,
How the troops of Midian
Prowl and prowl around ? ”

If we did more by word and deed, if we were only more united on the great fundamentals of our faith, we Christians by our determination could push back the attacks against our belief and the assaults upon Christ's vineyard. Idleness, personal indifference, spiritual slackness, too much absorption in the marketplace are, in these days, crippling God's work which He has given us to do until He come.

“ Work, for the night is coming,
Work thro' the morning hours ;
Work, while the dew is sparkling,
Work 'mid springing flowers ;
Work, when the day grows brighter,
Work in the glowing sun ;
Work, for the night is coming,
When man's work is done.”

V

I must Love and Obey it

“Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it.”—EPHESIANS V. 25.

WE often speak of *the Church*. The Collect for to-day prays that Christ’s “Church may be kept in continual godliness.”

It was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ—to be His Family upon earth, and it was filled with the Holy Spirit on Whit-Sunday.

St. Paul compares it to “a great house” in which are different sorts of vessels and articles of furniture.

It is spoken of as Christ’s Bride in the Book of the Revelation.

In the Acts of the Apostles we see how the Church was planned, viz. :—

It was to be ruled by—

- (1) Bishops ;
- (2) Priests or Elders ;
- (3) Deacons :

a threefold ministry.

These three orders were to guard and

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give to the people the three mysteries, viz. :

- (1) Baptism ;
- (2) Confirmation ;
- (3) Holy Communion :

and to hand on the ministry.

1. The Church is to Christians exactly what the army is to our nation. She is existing to fight the Lord's battles upon earth—the Church Militant—fighting.

2. She must be entered in the Lord's appointed way—namely, through the door of Baptism.

3. She hands to all who are confirmed the Sword of the Spirit, by Whom we can alone conquer, for He helpeth our weaknesses. Our public enlistment.

4. She supplies the soul's needs in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. Also by her prayers through which our spirits have their "conversation in heaven." What would an army do without its commissariat or food department ?

5. Then, further, the Church has her discipline and drills :—

(1) She can impose punishments ; she can excommunicate.

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(2) She can inflict penance and give absolution.

(3) It is her duty to rebuke as well as to exhort.

(4) But above all she is a Teacher to all those who desire to become disciples. A teacher of one God, one Saviour, one Holy Spirit, one Faith and one Hope of our calling in Christ.

6. There are many who have founded religious societies, but there is only *one Christian Church as founded by Christ and His Apostles*; and if you desire to read about its beginning and growth, then the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles will tell you all you need to know.

7. It is always difficult to obtain as many volunteers as we would like. Religion does not use compulsion; though in several countries we know compulsion is employed to build up armies. Once our Lord said, "Compel them to come in, that my Table may be furnished with guests."

God does still in a sense compel some to admit His claim. But we know very well that the great majority find all kinds

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of excuses for not coming out as members of Christ's army—His Church.

1. Let me say I cannot understand how any man, woman or child can deliberately offer God any excuse. It seems to me like a direct insult to the Cross and our Saviour to say :—

(1) I can't come this year.

(2) I will if so and so will.

“ We die alone as we are born alone.”

2. Do we wait to do right until another does.

3. I am not good enough. God knows that better than you, and that is just why He wants you, to undergo the discipline of His Church and to be helped by His means of grace.

4. What a hypocrite you would be if you said for a moment you were good enough for the Saviour.

5. Brethren ; the truth is that many who make these excuses desire to continue in their present way of living ; and don't you think God can see through it ? Can you and I deceive Him, “ to Whom all hearts are open and from Whom no secrets are hid ” ?

VI

The Home of All

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that *not* many *wise* after the flesh, not many *mighty*, not many *noble* are called.”—I CORINTHIANS i. 26.

SEE means “consider.” To the Jews the Cross was a stumbling block. To the Gentiles foolishness. But it was God’s way of saving the world.

He called the weak and the simple, and they surprised the mighty and the wise.

So weakness and simplicity gained what was not granted to great intellects to do. Therefore, all the glory was God’s and not man’s.

2. The very beginning of Christianity was amongst shepherds and in a stable, and a carpenter’s home was the earthly abode of the Son of God.

When our Lord became a man and started His full ministry, did He alter this ?

Look at the men who were His Apostles. One a fisherman. Another a clerk. Men of humble origin and unlearned Galileans,

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insomuch that the Jews said after the day of Pentecost had come, "Are not all these Galileans?"—meaning by that that they were surprised at their power.

3. We read also that our Lord was listened to by the crowd much more readily and gladly than He was by the rich. His teaching was a new socialism, in which one man in God's sight was as precious as another, and He desired that we should be a great society of brothers and sisters, a holy family on earth.

Some one said in this neighbourhood a little time ago that "the Church was no place for the working man and it was only for the gentry." I should be very sorry if that was true. Of course, it is absolutely false.

Our Lord in many places, by the parables He used, showed how He loved the working man, e.g.:

- (1) The labourers in the vineyard.
- (2) The sower going forth to sow.
- (3) The fishermen.
- (4) The publican in the Temple at prayer.

But our Lord ever listened to any-

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body, rich or poor, working man or leisured man, who came to Him. He never intended His Church to be a class Church, but it was and is for all.

Think of His story of the shepherd with the 100 sheep, and you will see His love for *every* wanderer from the fold—that He may bring him home rejoicing.

What about the Church to-day? It tries to follow that example. The poor man's child is baptized with the same words as that of the rich. The poor man or the working man may drink out of the same cup as his master.

Then take Christian teaching. The Church teaches the working man's child more about Christ than any other body of Christians.

You may send your children to public schools, high schools, grammar schools, but they will never get the same amount of Christian teaching as is given in the Church day school.

The clergy are ever ready to visit the sick and the dying, and they are far more often amongst the working men at such a time than amongst the wealthier.

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Only twice do I remember being asked to pray beside the well-to-do, but I cannot count the number of those working men and women to whom I have ministered with great pleasure.

Never believe those who tell you that the Church is no place for the working man.

It is a lie. Look into the working parts of our great towns in England, and you will see what the Church is trying to do for her children. She wants them to have better houses, better wages, better homes, better lives, and she is spending millions every year—over five last year—in her endeavour to bring the light of the Gospel to every creature at home and abroad. Sisters of Mercy, Deaconesses and an army of faithful men and women are daily showing their love for their fellow-men, not by stirring up rivalry between sect and sect and class and class, but by showing forth some of the fruits of the Spirit of God—such as love, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, gentleness both to the penitent thief and to the rich gluttons.

She, the Church, is still to-day the best friend of publicans and sinners.

VII

My Reasons for Joining it

“Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”—I ST. PETER iii. 15.

TO be asked our reasons for being what we profess to be demands that we should be certain of our own ground.

If I am an optimist I should be able to say why, or my position is unproductive of convincing result. If I am an unbeliever I ought to be able to give a definite reply to those who seriously ask me why I take such a line.

So St. Peter, speaking to Christians, tells them they should be always ready to give an answer for the hope that is in them.

But he adds that this reply should be with “meekness and fear.” How often bitterness and hard words and unkind expressions accompany any argument as to our religious views. This, of course, is wrong and destructive of that loving, gentle appeal which a kindly reply will

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often make even to the most carping questioner.

The early Christians must have been constantly faced with inquiries as to why they had changed their views and turned from Judaism or heathenism to worship the Triune God. They would have to meet objections, scoffings and doubts as to their new form of belief.

Out of this condition of things our three great creeds emerged, chiefly as statements of belief but also as answers to numerous heresies and objections which were in existence.

It is impossible for any one to hold an opinion or belief about any subject without there being a certain amount of dogma or creed.

The politician has a definite creed, so has the medical man, so has the philosopher: thus, too, the Christian cannot escape from the necessity of stating his faith. Therefore the creeds of the Christian are the standing orders of every member of the Christian Church. They contain all those great essential truths which Christ and His Church have laid

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down and taught as being necessary for our salvation.

Some one may ask you, "Why you are a Churchman?" Some imagine that it is sufficient to live a moral life, without any foundation of Christian faith.

But if this be so I might as well be a Jew. "It is our duty to examine the evidences of religion."

I am a Churchman because I believe that the plan of my Church is more in harmony with Christ's own method than that of any other body on earth. I believe that a threefold ministry has scriptural authority and divine origin and is contemporaneous with apostolic days and practice. I believe that the emphasis placed upon Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion in the Church is fully in accord with all that I read in the Acts of the Apostles, and also in the lives of those who guided Christ's Church immediately after the deaths of the Apostles.

I am convinced that they knew better the mind of our Lord Jesus Christ than any men who have lived since.

I look at the history—the long and

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chequered history of the Church, and notwithstanding mistakes and errors I am convinced that Christ has not left it, because He promised that He would be always with us. Further, I am satisfied that the teaching of the Church with regard to Holy Baptism is along the lines of our Lord's own words to Nicodemus, and involves a spiritual though often unconscious regeneration or new-birth into Christ's earthly and visible kingdom here in our midst. I am convinced that the Church's views as to the Holy Communion being "the strengthening and refreshing of our souls" is in full accord with those deeply spiritual words of our Master in the sixth chapter of St. John, where He says, "My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood dwelleth in Me and I in him." Further, I trust my Lord that when He spoke of an intermediate state—which He called Paradise to the thief on the Cross—He signified as by His own Resurrection that our resurrection must precede our final and lasting happiness or our final and

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lasting misery. I believe further that our Lord's scrupulous attention to the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish Church with its Fasts and Festivals indicated that He desired us to follow His example and pay the closest attention to the Fasts and Festivals of His own Church. I look up and down over the world and see no system of worship which comes so near the Divine pattern as does that of our own Church with its font, its lectern, its sanctuary and its altar; and therefore I hold fast to the horns of that altar and I strive for the faith which has once been delivered to the Saints, and I cling to that Church which brings me into closest touch with my Redeemer and supplies me with all those channels of grace with which many another has dispensed to its own great loss.

“Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore opprest,
By schisms rent asunder
By heresies distrest,”

I claim her as my Mother on earth, and
I desire to be found an obedient child and
one who has made some small attempt
“to love, honour and succour her.”

VIII

I must Remain True to it

“And Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.”—ST. LUKE ix. 62.

WE were thinking last Sunday evening about the verse before our text.

We saw that a man had been touched and had decided to follow Christ, but ruined his decision by adding that he wanted to do something else first.

What he wanted to do seemed “quite innocent and even right.” He said, “Suffer me first to bid farewell to those which are at home at my house.”

Doubtless our Lord saw in the man’s heart, and probably in his manner too, a backwardness and shrinking from the work which drew out the warning here given. “Those who would follow Christ must give themselves up wholly to Him.” There must be no backward looks (like those of Lot’s wife); only a steadfast, unflinching eye to the work of the great

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Master. I think the words of our text often frighten many from making a start. It is well that we should be reminded that we cannot play fast and loose or blow hot and cold and be useful to Christ.

Are not domestic reasons often given in these days as reasons why some cannot come to Church? Christ does not wish His followers or His ministers to be unnatural: our religion teaches us to be kind and good in every relation, to show piety toward our relations, but we must not make these duties come between us and God.

“One thing is needful.” “Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.” “But Martha is cumbered about much serving.” There are many to-day who are abject slaves to their homes and rarely give one hour a week to the soul’s care.

There are those who will walk miles on a Saturday evening to fetch their marketings, but cannot go outside the door on Sunday!

There are some who hesitate to join the Church for fear of hurting some relation

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or severing with old associations in another religious body. What does our Lord say to those who have heard His Voice speaking, "This is the way, walk ye in it," and still hesitate? These are His words, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." If the nearest and dearest relation we have in the world stand in our way to keep us from Christ, we are warned against even a look back. The man in our text was called to be a minister.

It is a rule that whenever we feel called to a duty we must not let friends or relations or old ties keep us back. Have we not seen quite recently how Mr. Campbell, the great preacher at the City Temple, has felt it his duty to join the Church which tries to follow so closely the methods of the New Testament? He had been for twenty years a member of the Congregationalists and has now received ordination in our own Church. It may be that a man has been brought up to regard the Sacraments of Christ as unnecessary, he has regarded Baptism and Confirmation as mere forms, when

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suddenly or by degrees he sees they are divinely appointed means of grace, and he puts his hand to them and says, I will follow along this way.

I may be speaking to some who put their hand to the plough many years ago. How do you stand to-night? Are you looking back? Have you grown cold and careless? In that state you are not "fit" for the Kingdom of God. Our Lord does not say you cannot be fit, but that you are not at the moment.

It is just here the true meaning of conversion comes in. There is need to turn to those things which alone can profit us eternally.

Are you afraid to put your hand to the plough lest you may look back? Have you no confidence in God's help? Are you so weak-minded that you cannot even make a bold effort to walk in His ways? Do you want to? Does not that question really put the matter in its proper light? What is standing in your way? Some sin? That can be forgiven if it is sincerely regretted.

Is it some scruple that can most likely

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be cleared 'up by conversation with some friend who is right-minded. Is it some habit about which you are uncertain? That, too, can be made clear by proper advice.

Is it doubt that you are fit to come? But if you don't you are not fit; so is it not better to make the venture and be on the safer side? Can you point me to any one else except Christ who has promised eternal life to those who become his faithful servants? Can you show me any other faith that begins to open out into vast and boundless directions just when earthly hopes cease and all our human surroundings slip away?

Can you tell me anything else but Christ's promise that can comfort your last hour in the valley of the shadow of death? Seize then the plough of faith; go up and down the lonely furrows. His rain and His sunshine and His dew will bring forth in due season more than you had ever hoped. Seize the plough of prayer and dig deep into every branch of your daily life, and you will find that untold blessings and peace will come into

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your heart and enable you to meet temptation and to repent the falls and backward gazes which now and again you will probably experience.

Never leave go the plough. Drive a way with it through the ice of doubt and cleave a way through the hardest days, and only in Paradise look back and thank God that you were faithful even unto death and by your very perseverance have won the crown of life. There is something in front worth working for: there is something in front worth keeping our gaze upon.

“Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”

“Unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear . . . and all that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed.”

“In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.”

IX

Its Corporate Power amongst Men

“And do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren.”—ST. LUKE xxii. 32 (R.V.).

AS we scan the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ we observe that He was interested directly and indirectly in the affairs that belong to daily life.

It is obvious, for instance, that the bodily conditions of men and women and children constantly received His attention and healing touch. He healed and fed the body. The mourners are not forgotten in His first sermon. The peacemakers are called “the children of God.” He was interested in ploughing and sowing and reaping. He handled the problem of Labour and wages in the parable of the Labourers. He scathed hypocrisy and cant with language that could not be misunderstood. He touched upon war and its inevitable existence and He empha-

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sized the need of loyalty to the Powers that be.

I often think that the Church which is the living Body to bear witness for Christ could do more to prove herself our Mother in those things which are "requisite and necessary for the body as well as the soul."

Have we not, many of us, sometimes forgotten that our duty to God cannot be performed aright unless we are doing our duty to our neighbour as well? Few persons who enjoy the Faith of Christ realize that they have a duty towards their fellow-men.

Is there not too much individualism even in religion?—"my soul," "my salvation," "my good," "my happiness." In no sense do I plead for a meddling, interfering policy, but I ask, are we as members of Christ showing much interest in social problems, in things that affect the man in the street? Is the Church sufficiently occupied in making the masses feel that she is fighting against wrongs that threaten to convulse and revolutionize our land?

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There are many who distrust the Church; they think she is a class Church. There have been notable exceptions where the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood has been strikingly prevalent. "Dearly beloved brethren" are words which stand at the beginning of our services on Sundays, but where are they sometimes in the week that follows?

Too much has been left to the clergy. Hundreds, nay thousands, are still standing idle among the rank and file, and the full force and power of the Church have not been felt, because individualism has obscured the corporateness of the Church. While the Roman Catholics have stubbornly declined to part with their schools, many of ours have been handed over without any or much effort to save them from secularization, and so religious teaching has become less; and that is a very strong factor when we ask why are we not more effective—spiritually and morally? Can we wonder at our own powerlessness to influence, to help and to inspire trust, if we ourselves are not faithful to our Lord's own orders, and if

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we openly neglect to "fight manfully under His banner against sin, the world and the devil" ?

Have we not also very often presented to the world a very divided front even as a Church ? We have thought more about being High Church, Low Church or Broad Church than of being devoted followers of Christ, and so we have wasted precious opportunities of influencing and helping mankind, while we have spent our energies upon "mint and anise and cummin."

I have often thought that if the mass of mankind could only be drawn to love the Church and to regard her as a Spiritual Home as our Lord's Apostles loved Him and found in Him a Friend and Redeemer, we should begin to understand the purpose for which He planted His Church and why He died for it. That there will be cranks and Judases to the end we know, but there is no department of society which will ever be wholly free from impostors and curiosities. In the great problems after the war—problems of capital and labour, and the closer fusion

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of all departments of society for the welfare of the nation, has not the corporate, united voice of the Church a unique and glorious opportunity? "O pray for the peace of Jerusalem : they shall prosper that love thee."

Where must this leavening influence begin? Surely in each congregation first.

Look at the strength of trades unions to-day. What a communion is the Church into which you and I by Baptism have been admitted! Yet, for the most part, it stands idle, like some huge engine with insufficient steam-power to set it in motion!

And this just because our force is dissipated instead of being concentrated. Just because even amongst ourselves we are divided and are not one body nor one in hope and doctrine nor in charity, so we do not strengthen our brethren or exert the power which we might.

X

Am I only Serving Cæsar ?

“Render . . . unto God the things that are God’s.”—ST. MATTHEW xxii. 21.

OUR Lord in to-day’s Gospel shows very clearly that man has (distinct) religious duties as well as the duties of citizenship.

As we look about us we see that men are more or less obeying the laws of the State very often because they are bound to do so. It has to be remembered that in religious matters man is permitted to use his freewill, but there is even here a tremendous responsibility resting upon those who refuse to render unto God the things that are God’s.

Put it to yourselves. You are law-abiding citizens ; you pay your tribute—not always gladly, perhaps, but of necessity. How about the higher duties—those demands which are made upon you by a belief in God, in the Saviour, in the

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Holy Spirit, in His Church and in His Book? Are they receiving anything like the same attention which, through compulsion, you render to the State?

If we are believers, then our faith can only be honourably held if we endeavour to carry out those spiritual claims which God makes upon our consciences. To say we are loyal Britons and then to omit the very duties which alone can prove our loyalty would give the lie to our boasted citizenship.

Apply the same argument to the realm of religion. Do I enjoy hearing about the blessings of faithful hearts and allow all my inmost feelings to be moved by hymns and prayers and spiritual aspirations, and yet continue to remain merely a member of Cæsar's household, never committing myself any further than to be one of the crowd which throngs and presses the Christ but never getting into close, personal touch whereby alone I may feel the healing power of His Presence?

If this is so, then we are simply aliens and foreigners who dwell within the spiritual camp, as it were, but deprive

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ourselves of the full rights and privileges which belong to the people of God. If God is our Heavenly Father, and if the Lord Jesus is our Saviour and our King, then why not render to Him the homage and devotion which He asks and asks from willing hearts ? Why allow the best of our lives to pass as though Christ was only for our dying hours ? Why keep back from the family which gathers round His Table until we have given all our talents and time to Cæsar ? As we review our lives, does not our tribute to religious acts seem very meagre and ungrateful if, as we believe, our whole future rests upon the service we yield to Him now and upon our obedience and faith while here on earth ? Do my business, social position, citizenship, all of which must cease, compensate me for the loss of everlasting peace and joy which belong to those who fear God and keep His commandments ?

“ Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet and strong and ah ! so patient
Brought me nearer, while I whisper’d,
‘ Less of self, and more of Thee.’ ”

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Higher than the highest Heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love, at last, hath conquer'd.
Grant me now my soul's desire,
None of self, and all of Thee."

XI

Concentration Needed

“For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them : but Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance.”—PSALM xliv. 3.

THERE is, at the present time, a great concentration of our material forces—military, naval, industrial and commercial—that by every legitimate means in our power we may overcome tyranny and barbarism which have arisen in a so-called Christian age. The very conflicting elements even of political views are, for a season, buried in a united effort to face the foe of Christianity and civilization as one solid, determined people.

Our own honour, our freedom and national safety are at stake.

From the child who collects the penny for the wounded to the minister of State

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who guides our nation, every one of us by word or deed is "on service" for Right against cruel wrong.

But are those great spiritual forces concentrated as they ought to be on this righteous cause? Those spiritual forces which in Old Testament days and in the New were never appealed to in vain when the attitude of God's children was humble and their character purged from sin.

That our nation has many sins upon its shield we cannot deny. God has not always been sought first, and many glaring social evils have remained untouched. But the hour has struck, and there is a clear call to lift up our hearts and voices to Him Who is the Lord of Battles.

How many of us each day in our private prayers, I wonder, are asking the Almighty Father to grant success to our arms and to defend the cause of the widow and the fatherless? I want to ask this one thing to-day—that each in this Church will regularly at home, morning and evening, every day in our private

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prayers, humbly and earnestly beseech the Almighty to bless the cause of the Right—the cause that stands for humanity, for freedom and honour. “There are more things wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”

In the eyes of the civilized world the moral influence of our enemy is already destroyed by his own immoral weapons.

Shot and shell and brave men are doing wonders to reduce the physical power of the foe, and also at what a sacrifice! But the very love of God on Calvary poured forth the water and the blood by which the faithful are still redeemed.

Brethren, evil can be only finally overcome by the invisible power of prayer, which puts heart and nerve into the soldier and sailor and keeps the nation behind them steady, with faces upturned to God above, Who has promised to hear us when we cry. Are we doing our duty to make the weapons of war successful by real fervent prayer, or, are we trusting merely to “earthly armour”? If there are any here who *never* pray, will you not begin as from to-day? Pray that help

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may be sent down. Pray that we may be "godly and quietly governed," that "wickedness and vice may be punished," and that "true religion and virtue may be maintained." There are many who ask—If there be a God, can He permit all this terrible bloodshed and destruction? We verily show our belief in the Sovereignty of God by prayer and that He can and will overrule the wickedness of man and punish the sins of the ungodly. While the enemy seems to prevail, while evil appears to be stronger than right, we hear Christ's words from the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" There is, surely, a purpose in all these days of trial—a purpose which can only be brought to a successful issue by the surrender of all efforts to the consecration of ourselves to One Who is over all and in us all, and Who, most surely, is "the Strength of all them that put their trust in Him."

In the hour of darkness, faith alone can wait and hope for the dawn. In the time of weakness and loneliness, prayer is the invisible shield; and

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are we raising such prayers to Heaven that our trust in God becomes the very rock upon which our hopes and lives are built under the "light of His countenance" ?

XII

The Individual Call

“And Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose and followed Him.”—
ST. MATTHEW ix. 9.

MOST of us are, as a rule, interested in the early life of a person who attains to any prominence amongst his fellow-men.

That is partly why the Church marks, in every year, certain days for certain men. We keep in memory the history and work of the Apostles and Evangelists, for instance, by calling certain days after their names.

Last Thursday we were reminded of St. Matthew, who became an Apostle, Evangelist and Martyr. He seems to represent the business man up to a certain point.

His calling was that of a publican—one

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who collected the taxes and customs from the Jews ; these payments were enforced by the Roman authorities. The best bidder at a public sale usually obtained these appointments, and then let them out in subdivisions to inferior collectors who were assisted by the Roman soldiers.

The Jews regarded the publicans with considerable disdain, and so, as a rule, only the love of gain could induce a Jew to undertake the work. These publicans had a bad reputation for exacting more than they should have done, and also used military force to execute their demands.

This calling, then, bore no good name, but all who followed it were not necessarily tainted by its sins.

Matthew belonged to this profession, and was sitting in his office, as it were, when Jesus called him.

His hands were full of business, his head of calculations, and his heart probably of profit. He responded to the appeal of Christ, and we have to-day the Gospel according to St. Matthew written by a business man who was led to see the need,

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the beauty and the joy of being a real disciple of Christ.

Matthew felt it a call to leave his business and to join Christ's little band. He entered the ministry! Many since that day have left very lucrative posts in order to preach Christ to others.

The National Mission, which has commenced, is a distinct call to every section of the community. It is no imperative demand to forsake labour, trade industry, or the like, but an appeal to admit Christ and all that word signifies into our dealings one with another, and so to write another Gospel of miracles in these days of ours!

The war will one day end; our soldiers will come back to us with minds broadened and educated by travel, by mixing with their fellow-men, by sights and suffering of which we only read. The problems of after-war conditions will face us and call loudly for adjustment. The religious outlook of thousands will have become intensified by having been up against the face of death and by the fact of vacant chairs in many a home. England, in our

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time, will never be the same ; blood has been shed ; crippled bodies will be living evidences of sacrifice. How shall we as citizens of a Christian land face the rebuilding of England when all those thousands return ?

Think you that the inadequate consideration of the housing of the poor will be suffered to continue ? Will the long conflict between labour and capital and capital and labour have no solution ? Will politics still continue to be upon party lines rather than upon the principle of the greatest good ? What influence alone can save this land of ours from an internal strife of tongues but the influence of men and women who have determined to follow Christ in their daily callings, whatever they may be ? Some have been sitting at the seat of very doubtful customs. We are called to repent and to do differently while we are there and not after we have retired. One man in his daily work has more power for Christ than three Bishops. If we only believed that our attitude now and our response to Christian duties now is

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the foundation of our own future happiness or misery, I am convinced that capital would not squeeze labour and that labour would only demand its proper rights. Many follow Christ without sacrifice of opinions, just in their own way for personal satisfaction ; but what a rude awakening awaits them when Christ says, " I never knew you," just because they have failed to show the very elements of Christianity—an interest, that is, in their fellow-men. You may say to me, There will always be something wrong with men and things to the end of time. I quite agree. But because that is so are we justified, in the face of Christ, in not raising even a little finger to lessen corruption, abuses, grinding, extortion and indifference to spiritual and moral surroundings ? Inasmuch as we answer the cry, the call of our fellow-men, we are replying not only to them but to Christ Himself.

The National Mission is a call to us to reflect seriously upon our citizenship, and doing that we shall find that Christianity, sincerely followed, will alone supply con-

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siderable healing to the wounds of society in all its departments, whatever the class. Suppose for one moment if only one-half of the members of Parliament were devoted Christian men and had listened to Christ's appeal, would that have no effect upon England ?

If only a few of us were to make an effort to follow Christ in Prayer, in Sacrament and Hope, we should find it much more difficult to acquiesce in many things of which now, perhaps, we say, Oh, it is only custom. It is from the power of any practices opposed to true Christianity that God is calling us in many ways to-day and bidding us to follow a little more in His steps.

Perhaps if I quote to you some words of Admiral Beatty's you will be better able to realize that what I have been saying is not only the opinion of clergymen.

Admiral Beatty says : " England still remains to be taken out of the stupor of self-satisfaction and complacency in which her great and flourishing condition has steeped her ; and until she can be stirred

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out of this condition, and until religious revival takes place at home, just so long will the war continue. When she can look only on the future with humbler eyes and a prayer on her lips, then we can begin to count the days towards the end."

XIII

Our Witness for Christ

“Ye shall be witnesses unto Me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth.”—Acts i. 8.

THE four Sundays in Advent bring very clearly to our notice, first of all, man’s darkness until sin is repented of ; then the illumination and cheer of God’s Word ; and to-day the work of the Christian ministry in bringing about those two results ; and next Sunday we are taught to pray for the power and presence of God without which all our efforts must fail.

What, then, are the chief works of the Church to-day in preparation for that coming of our Judge ?

(a) “*The blind receive their sight.*” Satan has placed a kind of spiritual cataract over the eyes of many. They begin by losing sight gradually of those

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simple happy thoughts of God which we had, perhaps, as children.

The work of the ministry is, first of all, to restore, through God, the lost sight to those who are at present not seeing God in their words and thoughts and deeds.

(b) Again, "*The lame walk.*" How hard it is, apparently, for some to take a definite Christian step.

There seems to be a stubborn lameness which keeps men and women in the same spiritual position for many years, until, at last, they become quite used to it and not in any degree alarmed at their positive standstill condition. The doubter is lame.

The person who hears God's Word and does not obey it, is lame—making no progress. The work of the ministry is, through the power of the Holy Spirit, "to help the doubting by speaking with authority, pointing out the way and supplying, through her ministrations, power to walk in that way."

(c) Again, "*the lepers are cleansed.*" It would be a sad state of things if our

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religion had no balm or healing comfort for the sin-stained and the diseased ! The comfortable words of our Communion Service breathe the saving message of a Saviour—"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

(d) "*The deaf hear.*" Spiritual deafness is very often wilful. "There are none so deaf as those who won't hear." People turn a deaf ear very often when they do not like what they are being told. But only those can be called true disciples of our Lord who hear and obey the Voice that speaks within each heart.

(e) "*The dead are raised.*" It would be very disheartening if we could not point to any cases where men and women had not risen to better things. We know people who have done so by God's power ; we have read, too, of many who have done so ; but still there are souls to-day in a lifeless, moribund condition which is spiritual death. Is there one here ?

Lastly, "*The poor have the Gospel preached to them.*" There is no class distinction in the Gospel of Christ—it is for all ; His Church is catholic—univer-

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sal, world-wide. The message is as much for the tramp as for the crowned head, for the poorest as well as for the richest—"He wishes all men to be saved." "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Thus the Church is to be a witness unto Christ.

XIV

A Cross to Bear

“And the Lord God said unto the serpent, I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed : it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel.”—GENESIS iii. 15.

AS we go to the first book in the Bible for the story of man's creation, man's fall and the sentence upon man's race, so we find in the words of our text the first promise of that victory which we Christians celebrate on Easter Day.

To-day we are thinking of the awful struggle which took place upon the Cross : the enmity between the Evil One and mankind found its keenest period when the sinless Body of Jesus was bruised for our salvation. Here at the very beginning of the Bible is the great prophecy of that death-struggle which opened once more to mankind the gates of Paradise. The sentence of death passed by God upon

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mankind is still hanging over us all. "The wages of sin is death." Man had been made "very good," but a disobedience of His Maker's command had brought in death. What God intended for man before he fell we do not know ; but in the light of Christ's revelation we *do* know that God gives back to men and women, who obey Him, those great blessings which were forfeited through sin.

But death still reigns ; no argument can destroy the truth of this. Yet death since Christ's death is but the bruising of our heel as compared with the bruising of death's head. The sting of death is removed when sin is regretted and pardoned in Christ.

Now with St. Paul we can say, "O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? The sting of death is sin ; but thanks be to God Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." "He hath overcome the sharpness of death." God henceforth looks upon Christ's death as an atonement for sin.

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“And now, O Father, mindful of the Love
That bought us once for all on Calvary’s tree.”

Thus God is able to look upon us as found in Christ, and He justifies us, not through our own merits, but through Christ’s.

“Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone :
Thou must save and Thou alone.”

Christ has founded a new race. He has become the second Adam. “The second man is the Lord from Heaven.”

“O wisest love ! that flesh and blood
Which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
Should strive and should prevail.”

Good Friday was the fulfilment of our text, the bruising of the serpent’s head, the bruising of man’s heel. Death to the believer is now but a foot wound, as compared with the hopeless outlook which prevailed before the Crucifixion. But, brethren, while we have been singing this morning about the saving value of the Blood of Jesus, while we have been thinking of the merits of Christ which

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alone have reopened Paradise, has it not occurred to you that in order to enjoy the fruits of the Cross and Passion we must put on Christ ; we must by faith perform those acts which He has commanded ; we must, in fact, take up our Cross, if we are to be His disciples ? To the worldly man there is no bruising of the serpent's head, and therefore no enjoyment of what Christ has done, for He tells us that no man cometh to the Father except through Him.

Our Lord on one occasion spoke of those who opposed Him as the seed of the devil—"O generation of vipers !" The merits of Christ's Sacrifice only belong to those who try to follow and serve Him. It is, indeed, a comfort to us to know that even His truest servants must expect to be bruised a little in the conflict with sin and death ; but to the obedient believer it is but as the heel compared with the vital part—the head.

If you had stood under His Cross and knew all you know to-day, would you follow His every command to the best of your ability ? Would you be baptized

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because He ordered it as an act of faith and a channel of grace? Would you become a communicant because it was His last command and by it you “show forth His death, until He come again” and become a partaker of His most Blessed Body and Blood—broken and shed for you? Ask yourselves that question this Good Friday morning, and then ask yourselves, *How* can I expect to enjoy the benefits of the Cross if I have not even begun to follow and obey Him, and *how* can I ever hope to bruise Satan without my Saviour, and *how* can I face, with any hope, the gate of death and the promise of everlasting life if I am not a disciple of Him Who said, “I am the Resurrection and the Life . . . whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die”?

“To Thy dear Cross turn Thou mine eyes in dying;

Lay but my fainting head upon Thy breast;
Those outstretch'd arms receive my latest sighing;
And then, oh! then, Thine everlasting rest.”

(121 A. & M.)

XV

Helps by the Way

“Who passing through the Valley of Baca make it a well ; the rain also filleth the pools.”—PSALM lxxxiv. 6.

THE meaning of the word “Baca” is “weeping,” or “misery.” It was, probably, a dreary valley, through which, from some parts of the land, the people must pass in going up to the Temple at Jerusalem. But they who, out of love for God’s House and His services, faced the gloomy journey, were carried well through it.

The word “pools” signifies also “blessings.”

The verse may be rendered, “The rain of blessings covereth them”; this was not only refreshing rain, in plenty, to cool the ground and supply them with waters, but also “showers of blessings” of heavenly consolations.

Thus they were enabled to proceed

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with increasing vigour, till each one of them appeared before God in His Courts on Mount Zion. The whole passage seems descriptive of those pilgrimages which the Hebrews made from all parts to their Temple.

It is the expression of one who is apparently, at the moment, deprived of his Temple worship, and in his great love for God's House cries out, "My soul longeth for the courts of the Lord."

Most of us are more familiar with the Prayer Book version of this particular psalm, "Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well and the pools are filled with water."

We are living in days when many homes are full of sadness. In this and many other lands there is, indeed, a vale of misery through which thousands are passing and more will yet pass through. Are the comforts of our Belief in any sense a source of refreshment and strength; are the means of grace and the power of prayer at such a time without any influence upon our hearts and minds? Those surely who can turn in such times as these

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to the hope and joy and peace of our Faith in Jesus will find the valley of weeping full of many consolations and wonderfully rich in unexpected blessings of sympathy, unity and self-sacrifice; so that this valley of sorrow is becoming the narrow way which leads up to the "rest that remaineth" for the people of God.

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." We face a New Year full of unknown possibilities—a year more fraught with great events than the world has ever known. If we would brace our hearts and minds for the outcome, there must be some hidden secret of strength and trust and hope. That secret, brethren, lies in our earnest, humble use of those pools of blessing which God in His mercy has placed even in the valley of weeping. Never was the religion of the Crucified more powerful for encouragement and calm, strong trust than it is to-day. Never was God's Temple a more "sure refuge and strength." Never was the Sacrament of His Body and Blood more like manna in the wilderness. Never was prayer more like the smoke

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of the incense that goeth up. "In these days when bodies are broken and blood shed."

"Even in this vale of woe
Waters in the desert rise."

Tears may blur the eyes like raindrops against the window-panes, but blessed (or happy) is the man whose strength is in Thee : in whose heart are Thy ways—who going through the vale of misery uses even his very sorrows as a cleansing tide, and out of tears and long weary weeks of toil and patience reaps the golden harvest of everlasting joy in those heavenly places which our Lord has gone to prepare for them who love Him and take up their crosses and become His disciples.

So to-day, as we think of that wonderful act by which the Lord of all turned the water into wine, surely we can exercise sufficient faith to acknowledge that He can and will transform our sorrows into joys and make His Face to shine upon our tears, so that "the trials that beset us and the sorrows we endure will become jewels of right celestial worth, a ladder set up to Heaven on earth."

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“ He that now goeth on his way weeping and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him ” (Ps. cxxvi. 7).

XVI

Self-Discipline

“Let us break their bonds asunder and cast away their cords from us.”—PSALM ii. 3.

THE Gospel for this the first Sunday in Lent shows us the Perfect Man faced by temptations exactly similar to those which face you and me. They are the attacks of the flesh, the devil and the world. But we see our Lord victorious over each assault, and also it is instructive to observe that faith in God's Word in each case was the weapon that brought Him success. This weapon is ours to-day. I doubt if any one here will deny that the body has a great influence over our mind. Modern science recognizes this fact and teaches it. Now the Church at this solemn season of self-examination brings to our notice *three* very important thoughts for our help. If we desire to be masters of our bodies we shall do well to give our best attention to them.

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1. *Self-chastisement.* Suppose for a moment that some one has given way to excess and self-indulgence.

Do not these two things frequently, to our knowledge, absolutely ruin the individual life and the home life? We live in days when gambling and excessive luxury are irritating and stirring up the fires of hatred and envy. The proportion of money spent upon excesses and self-indulgences in comparison with the amount expended in alleviating genuine poverty and distress should cause us a sense of shame.

The drink bills, the tobacco bills, the betting bills for this country are out of all proportion. Lent calls to us as individuals to show that we still have, at least, some regret for this and bids us by some self-chastisement to do our part to prove that we are good and not unfaithful stewards of those things which have been placed in trust with us.

2. Then comes "self-control." The athlete knows well the value of such a practice.

The self-denial week of the Salvation

Self-Discipline

Army teaches a principle which underlies the very object of Lent.

In many places theatres are closed, parties and entertainments cease, during Lent to show that man can, at least, live without them for a time and give himself more wholly to those higher considerations of God, the soul and his fellow-man which, put together, sum up our duty towards God and our duty towards our neighbour—facts which we are apt to forget in days when Satan endeavours to dazzle us by tempting sights and sounds. This seems to me the essence of real, productive fasting.

Then, lastly, Lent suggests a desire for more devotion and especially for penitence.

There are thousands of souls who are not happy and yet they may become so. All they need is a conviction of their starvation apart from the heavenly food which is the Bread of Life to be found alone in Christ. There are dark clouds, of unforgiven sin, making many lives dull and gloomy, but the Sun of Righteousness is *waiting* to burst, in all His

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glory, over such a life in forgiveness ; and Lent calls us earnestly to draw up the blinds of death which darken our souls and to let in the news of Calvary and the sunshine of the Resurrection of our Redeemer.

Shall we try to profit, then, by this Lent ? And in due season we shall reap a harvest of joy.

XVII

New Life

(EASTER)

“The dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”—ST. LUKE i. 78, 79.

SPRING comes slowly. Still the trees are bare and dark. But the days are longer. Here and there in many a hedgerow the primrose peeps forth.

Gardens are showing signs that man's faith in nature is still the same. Even the birds are making melody and the woodland is rich with song. There is hope in nature.

“Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad.”

“Let the field be joyful and all that is in it, and the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord.”

2. Far back in the history of Israel

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there were dark and bitter days in "the land of Egypt, in the house of bondage."

Pharaoh grievously afflicted God's people. But Spring slowly came to them.

"When Israel was a child (among the nations) then God loved him." "He heard the mournings of such as were in captivity and delivered the children appointed unto death." "He brought a vine out of Egypt. He cast out the heathen and planted it."

"God hath brought His Israel
Into joy from sadness :
Loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke
Jacob's sons and daughters."

Brethren, that process of freedom was also slow, but it held the seed of hope which, in due season, blossomed forth in the promised land. "For the Lord their God brought them into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive and honey; a land wherein they ate bread without scarceness and where they lacked nothing; a land

New Life

whose stones were iron and out of whose hills they could dig brass" (Deut. viii.).

All this is a beautiful shadow of things to come—a parable in nature and in history of a fact in the spiritual life of our souls.

3. When the world was dark with sin and man had reached a climax in wickedness, "God sent forth His Son when the fulness of time had come." It was, indeed, winter, and hope was wellnigh crushed.

But there in the manger at Bethlehem lay the promise of Spring—man's new life. In Christ alone we have hope. A new element was infused into human nature. "The Word was made Flesh." "In Him was Life and the Life was the Light of men." But as in nature and in history there lay before the Saviour of mankind a long dreary conflict with opposing elements, culminating in the gloom and winter of Calvary and the Cross. He was buried in the stony sepulchre and all hope seemed blighted. But out of that death sprang life. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground

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and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." "Christ the firstfruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming." This is the hope of every Christian. This is the glorious message of Easter.

"I am He that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

"Tis the Spring of souls to-day;
Christ hath burst His prison."

4. Brethren, you and I have been buried with Christ in Baptism, "which was meant to signify a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness."

Is the power of the Resurrection making itself felt in our lives at all?

Are we in any sense "children of the Resurrection"?

Is "the winter of our sins" feeling to-day something of the warmth within, of the presence of His Holy Spirit quickening us into a higher, better, more hopeful life? Are there any fruits of the Spirit forming in our characters—fruits such as "peace, joy, love, longsuffering, gentle-

New Life

ness, goodness, faith" (Gal. v. 22) ? Brethren, these are some of the Christian's fairest flowers in the garden of the soul. They cheer even in the darkest hour ; they brighten the sick-room of our hearts and their sweet fragrance goes forth into the world, and by them men know that we are indeed disciples of Jesus and that we have come under the power of His Resurrection.

Every turning of a heart to Jesus is like the opening of the bud to the warm sun.

Our Spiritual Comforter is ever within us ; He penetrates the darkest clouds and shines in love and sympathy upon the bitterest tears shed in true repentance. Let us break up our fallow ground and allow the Heavenly Sower to bring forth in us the fruits of His Redemption—so beautifully symbolized by the emblems of corn and wine at the Lord's Great Feast.

Without the hope and peace which the Easter message brings, pain would be unendurable, the mourner would be in pitchy darkness, and the shadow of death

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so widely cast just now would destroy the beauty of life. But the dayspring from on high hath visited us and He alone is giving light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and is guiding their feet into the way of peace—God's peace—which “passeth all understanding.”

“Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours?”

Yes—

“Jesus has vanquish'd death and all its powers.”

XVIII

His Angel Guardians

“Alas, my Master! How shall we do? Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.”—2 KINGS vi. 15, 16.

MOST of us, I think, at times wonder how evil entered into God’s fair world.

On Wednesday next the Church calls our attention to the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels, and it seems to me that through the teaching on this subject we discover an answer to our inquiry about the presence of evil. That the evil one was in the world before man’s fall we are, of course, clearly told in the Bible. God’s creation produced satisfaction to the Creator, “and God saw everything that He had made and behold it was very good.”

How then came the change? When we turn to the Book of the Revelation, written by our Lord’s own beloved disciple, St. John, we read these striking words, “Woe

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to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea ! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child." The same chapter goes on to attribute the Flood to Satan's influence upon earth, and we are told that he makes war with those who "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Thus I think we shall admit that the Bible gives us a very clear explanation of the presence of a power which so often overthrows our good desires and wrecks our highest efforts.¹

We know ourselves that the enemy we fight is often a subtle, invisible foe—thoughts of evil, imaginations, doubts, fears and such like. Ours is a ghostly enemy. Evil angels assail us within. Does not St. Paul, very beautifully, describe the Christian's battle when he

¹ "Even evil spirits were created good, but kept not their own principality."—JUDE 6.

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writes to the Ephesian Church ?—" Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For," he says, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Here, too, we begin to learn the cause of those fightings within, when our wills, undoubtedly, come into conflict with opposition even in the very chambers of the soul. Let me quote to you St. Paul's own words, "I see another law *in* my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Brethren, there in those last words lies the secret of our victory over evil angels. We know that "our labour is not in vain in the Lord." Just when we feel the battle at its strongest, the Voice of Him Who spake to St. Paul speaks

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also to you and me and says, "I will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way of escape. My grace is sufficient for thee."

Yes, ranked on our side are innumerable hosts of angels of God, ministering spirits sent forth from the Throne of Grace to strengthen us in the desert of our loneliness and strife; to fight for us against the devil and his angels.

Oh! if we only realized that we are daily surrounded by "a great cloud of witnesses," we should "run with more patience the race that is set before us." Did not our Blessed Lord Himself, at the moment of His capture, say, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels"?

Let us ever remember in the battle of life that "they that be with us are more than they that be against us." But our eyes are blinded like Elisha's servant—blinded through trusting to our own feeble powers—blinded by not walking in the daylight of His commandments

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but in the darkness that casts a shadow over sacraments and prayer which are alone the "balm in Gilead" that can heal our wounds and restore our strength and furnish eye salve to our blinded sight by the power and presence of His Holy Spirit.

Oh! let us love and use them more that our eyes may be opened and that we may see that we are not fighting alone, but that God and His angels are on our side and that He is our "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

"O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee; mercifully grant, that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord." In our text, Elisha, the man of God, is surrounded in the City of Dothan by an army sent especially to capture him. Elisha's servant is alarmed, but the Prophet prays that his eyes may be opened, and they were; and what a vision he saw!—"the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." We have heard various reports of the miraculous

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escape of our soldiers in the retreat from Mons. Whatever we may believe about that, we know as Christians that the ministry of angels is one of the very clearest statements in the Bible—both Old and New Testaments.

“The presence of angels in our Lord’s life, right up to the day of His Ascension, is a wonderful revelation of God’s Providence over His own. In the Book of Daniel x. 18, 20, 21 ; xii. 1, we read of angels who are commissioned to guide the affairs of individual nations, for whom they fight, a fact which, unintelligible as it is to us, we are bound to receive together with all other words of inspiration respecting the mysteries of God’s wonderfully ordered creation.” (Dr. Stier on “The Words of the Angels.”)

“In days like ours, when ‘spiritualism,’ so called, attracts so much attention, when many pretend to hold communication with the unseen world and to converse with the spirits of the departed, it is useful to read in the Bible itself, what the real messengers from heaven talked about in New Testament times.

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“The contrast between the rubbish talked at reported ‘spiritualist’ meetings, and the grave, scriptural, reverent words which true ministering spirits uttered in the days of Christ and the Apostles, can hardly fail to strike every reflecting mind.” (Dr. J. C. Ryle.)

XIX

Our Character

“Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”—ROMANS xiv. 12.

IN these days when we see so many men suddenly called to change their ordinary pursuits and to undertake an entirely different kind of work under military discipline, one thing stands out very strikingly. It is, surely, the wonderful way in which thousands have adapted themselves, with almost immediate facility, to the new conditions of life—conditions which essentially enforce a severe discipline and not infrequently some hardships.

To many, after years of personal independence, it must seem very like going back once more to school days. To not a few there has come the call to sacrifice many home comforts and lucrative positions. Was there ever a time when history has recorded so many noble

Our Character

instances of self-sacrifice? Have men ever before been massed together in such numbers from every grade of society? Surely some result must inevitably spring forth from a fraternity and communion which vast armies of men from all parts now constitute in various regions of the world. But it seems to me that there is one pre-eminent thought in all this massing of men.

It is this. The individual man. We may have watched an enormous crowd at some football match or great fire, yet we know that every face, every figure represented a distinct personality, separate views, separate hopes, separate sins, separate virtues. So is it with our armies to-day. Behind the one common object of defeating the enemy there are thousands of individualities, which no military training, no massing together can ever turn absolutely into one mould of mind or soul.

You will see, then, at once how important it is that the individuality should be strong and not weak, colourless and insipid.

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I suppose there is no harder test of the strength of a man's faith than when he finds himself cast amongst those who never pray. Will he continue his acts of faith? Will his individuality in things spiritual be as strong as his separate personality? As strong as his love of home and dear ones and country? "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." Reports from the different military areas show very clearly that men's spiritual individualities are *not* lost amid the hosts of warriors: many a soldier has made his first communion within the range and roar of guns: to many a chaplain hearts have unburdened their load and received peace through repentance.

Brought face to face with eternal realities all those early lessons about God, the soul and immortality have come back to mind.

"Holy counsels long forgot
Breathe again 'mid shell and shot."

As angels watch us, surely they are saying, "What will this man do, what will he prove himself amongst new and trying

Our Character

circumstances, how will he unconsciously and undesignedly influence others? What excellences of character will come from him as he meets the shock of new surroundings? ”

Thus we bear our witness for or against Christ, whether we are soldiers on service or soldiers in our daily occupation here at home. On the other hand, the mind which is always calculating how much shall I get? how much shall I lose? is the sordid condition which reduces every action to a selfish unpatriotic level, and often makes a so-called Christian ashamed of the very Cross under which he was baptized and with which his brow is sealed.

There is one thing which, in the hour of trial, we need—it is character. There is one thing which alone we can carry away with us when we die—it is character. There is one thing which most of us prize but some throw away—character. In every phase of our life, both human and spiritual, we are writing our own characters—individually as “members of Christ, the children of God,” and let us remember

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we shall be judged not in masses, not collectively, but singly and individually. "Enter *thou* into the joy of thy Lord." "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

XX

May we Pray for our Faithful Departed ?

“And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.”—
ST. JOHN xvi. 23.

THERE are many persons who think it wrong to mention the departed in their prayers.

I suppose it is due partly to the fact that we strongly believe that this life is our trial time and that it is too late to expect any alteration after the body and spirit are separated. The story told by our Lord of Dives and Lazarus shows us that the state of those two men had been settled by their life on earth. But prayer for the faithful departed does not ask for any alteration of God's laws.

We miss the whole idea of prayer if we imagine that it means a special request that

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the person who while on earth was ungodly, disobedient, carnal, may be changed into a pure, obedient, devoted believer. I do not think you can find any authority in the Bible or Prayer Book for prayer for those who have not obeyed and tried to follow Christ upon earth.

It is only prayer for the faithful departed that we consider allowable. But here we are met with the objection that the faithful do not need our prayers. But when our Lord said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, believing, ye shall receive," He did not limit it to things or persons upon earth. Do the names of our dear faithful departed drop entirely from our lips as soon as they are out of sight? No, we love to talk of them and to recall many things which they did and spoke. Surely in our prayers to our Father we cannot cease to mention the names of those who were and are near and dear to us.

It cannot be wrong to commit them into a loving Father's care, to pray that light may shine upon them, that they may rest in peace and may share in the Resur-

Prayer for the Departed

rection of the Just and enjoy the gifts of eternal life—that they may be made perfect, sanctified: and also the very praying all this gives us consolation, and shows our belief in prayer not only for the earthly but for the faithful departed who have gone into the unseen world and are waiting and longing for their final happiness. Have you ever noticed how full our Prayer Book is of prayer not only for earthly things but for heavenly? We cannot think that the faithful departed have ceased to pray. Is it wrong, then, to join our prayers with theirs, when we even now “join with angels and arch-angels and all the company of Heaven in praising God”? If it is wrong to pray with and for them, it must be also wrong to dare to praise with them. But we know it is not wrong, but very helpful and comforting and a proof of our belief in the Communion of Saints.

In our daily prayer we pray that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy, and we know our life does not cease at the separation of spirit and body, or our religion is vain.

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In the Lord's Prayer we say, "Thy kingdom come," and Mr. John Wesley tells us those words mean not only the Kingdom of Grace but also of Glory. Mr. Wesley always prayed for the faithful departed, considering that Christ's Kingdom was not only upon earth but also in Paradise. Therefore, even the Lord's Prayer includes a petition for the faithful spirits now separated from the body.

In the "Te Deum" we say, "We therefore pray Thee help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood. Make them to be numbered with Thy Saints in Glory everlasting." Surely these words of necessity include all the faithful departed and not only us here upon earth!

In the Benedicite we sing, "O ye spirits and souls of the Righteous, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever." Are all the spirits and souls of the Righteous now upon earth? Nay, the language of the earliest Christians teaches us that the whole mystical or spiritual Body of Christ on earth and in Paradise join together still in prayer and praise.

Prayer for the Departed

Then look at our Burial Service, in which we pray "that we with all those that are departed in Thy Faith and Fear may have our perfect consummation and bliss both in body and soul."

Then, too, in our Communion Service we pray "and we also bless Thy Holy Name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy Faith and Fear; beseeching Thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples that with them we may be partakers of Thy Heavenly Kingdom."

On Sunday mornings Mr. John Wesley prayed, "Grant that they, and those that are already dead in the Lord, may at length enjoy Thee."

"That we, together with all those who are gone before us in Thy Faith and Fear, may find a merciful acceptance at the last day."

"O Lord, Thou God of Spirits and of all flesh, be mindful of Thy Faithful from Abel the just even unto this day: and for Thy Son's sake give to them and us in Thy due time a happy resurrection and a glorious rest at Thy right Hand for evermore."

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Mr. Wesley prayed for the departed daily. When Mr. Wesley collected his works and included these prayers he was sixty-eight years of age.

Prayer, then, for our dear, faithful departed is calculated to give us as much comfort as prayer for those we love in far-off lands: no barriers of space or time or conditions can alter the power and beauty of prayer, though of course the subjects of prayers for the departed are limited, as we believe temptations and sins cease beyond the veil; but while memory lasts and hopes live in us we cannot forget our dear ones before the Throne of Grace.

“There is an unbroken chain of evidence for praying for the faithful departed through the earliest ages: it runs through Fathers, monumental inscriptions, primitive liturgies, and rests on the teaching of Holy Scripture” (Luckock).

XXI

There Remaineth, therefore, a Rest for the People of God

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter :
Fear God and keep His commandments.”—ECCLE-
SIASTES xii. 13.

THE two chapters from the Book
“Ecclesiastes” read for the first
Lesson this morning are full of poetry and
feeling.

They seem to touch very closely that
conviction which comes to most of us
sooner or later that life apart from belief
in God and obedience to His commands
must end in utter dissatisfaction and hope-
lessness.

The writer of the Book is generally sup-
posed to have been Solomon.

The word “Ecclesiastes” really
means “one who gathers or addresses a
congregation or assembly.”

The alternative title in our Bibles is
“The Preacher.”

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Though there is a strong tone of despondency and moodiness running through many parts of the Book, very similar to some aspects of life to-day, yet the thought of a future judgment by a Righteous and Loving Judge illumines and warms the darkest and coldest conditions of a true believer's mind.

So these chapters are read at the end of another Christian year : read when days are short and nights are long—when the fallen leaves remind us that “change and decay” are preaching their silent sermon on every side. They come to us out of the dim past from the lips of him who built the first Temple and was surrounded by all that this world could give. Yet in comparison with the soul's eternal welfare even Solomon frankly admitted that all else was “vanity of vanities.”

We are once more come almost to the door of Advent—that holy season in which Christians are called upon to consider that inevitable judgment when “God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing whether it be good or whether it be evil.”

A Rest for the People of God

All the Christian seasons have spoken to us with their clear definite message—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, The Ascension, Whitsuntide, and the long season of Trinity Sundays.

“These have we scorned, O false and frail!
And now once more the appalling tale,
How Love Divine may woo and fail,
Of our lost year in Heaven is told:
What if our life as far were past
Our weeks all numbered to the last
With time and hope behind us cast
And all our work to do with palsied hands and cold.”

Are we satisfied with the Christian year which ends this week? Let us remember that for all these things God will bring us into judgment.

Some of us, perhaps, have thought that there were insurmountable obstacles to our Christian advance, and we have hesitated to take even one step forwards—we have heard His Voice but were afraid to respond because we realized our condition and our surroundings; but what does Ecclesiastes say? “He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.”

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“The due time for action must be seized. If we wait for the removal of every possible hindrance we shall probably lose what we might have secured.”

Surely it is a fitting time to review our past and to endeavour, by God's help, to make each remaining year more full of faith and practice.

“Soon our souls to God who gave them
Will have sped their rapid flight.
Able now by grace to save them,
Oh! that while we can we might.”

Day by day “the silver cord” of life is wearing thinner and the “golden bowl” will not last for ever, and “the wheel at the cistern” *must* give way. What are we doing to store up the oil of grace and the water of life?

“Life's little day sinks down to its appointed end.”

“Brighter still and brighter
Glows the western sun,
Shedding all its gladness
O'er our work that's done :
Time will soon be over,
Toil and sorrow past,
May we, Blessed Saviour,
Find a rest at last.”

*Printed for ROBERT SCOTT, Publisher, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C., by BUTLER
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	vi, 105p. ; 20cm.				

1. Church of England--Sermons. 2. European War, 1914-1918--Religious aspects--Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Title.

